



DIOCESE OF SALT LAKE CITY

*GUIDE FOR A VIBRANT PARISH SOCIAL
MINISTRY*

The Peace and Justice Commission created this guide to help you through the process of creating and sustaining a vibrant parish social ministry. This is not definitive but suggestions and tips from successful parish ministries.

Key Points

- **Begin with prayer:** prayer for personal conversion, prayer for discernment, prayer for faith sharing and group unity. Successful parish social ministries are prayer driven, not agenda driven.
- **The Key Themes of Catholic social teaching provide the identical foundation for many of our ministries:** social outreach, social mission, social concerns, respect life, peace and justice, and sustainability. Find ways to collaborate.
- **Plan Annually.** Create a mission statement.
- **Build with the passions of the committee and parish.** Parish social ministries form because parishioners see a need to help others and, as a consequence, parishioners want to change the laws, the systems, the organizations and the cultures that, because of their existence, create the need in the first place.
- **Meet consistently** (not necessarily frequently). Meeting consistently promotes collaboration and a sense of shared mission. Make meetings fun. Make

them brief, substantive and enjoyable. Have snacks. Have an agenda. Include prayer.

- **Communicate the accomplishments of your committee.** Celebrate!
- **Keep politics out of your Parish Social ministry meetings.** Catholic social teaching is neither Republican nor Democratic; neither left nor right. It is Catholic.
- **Parish Social Committee ≠ Parish Social Ministry.** The choir practices and then leads the congregation in song. The Parish Social committee plans, leads, educates and provides opportunities. Parishioners contribute in their own way: time, talent, treasure. That is your ministry.
- Tie each event and activity to one of the Seven Key Themes of Catholic social teaching. **Communicate this in your publicity and educate others on how your work is Catholic.** Use a one sentence definition of the CST or a whole paragraph, whatever parishioners will read.
- **Remember your strengths.** Do not ignore the strengths of your Parish Social committee while you are changing to embrace other groups, to be more attractive to new members, or to change direction or focus. Never ignore the strengths of your committee and your parish. These become imbedded in the parish culture. These define your parish culture.

- **Consider forming a Deanery Parish Social Committee.** If your parish social committee is small, there may be more enthusiasm, greater efforts, and wider participation if your vicariate formed a Parish Social Committee with representatives from member parishes.

Jesus Started with Twelve



Invite 6-12 individuals to join you in a start-up meeting for a parish social committee. The personal invitation is the most effective way to involve people. Bulletin announcements and letters are easy and ensure wider communication but do not have the same effect as a personal invitation. Jesus did not send out an email; He personally invited his Twelve Apostles.

Building an Effective, Committed, and Passionate Parish Social Committee

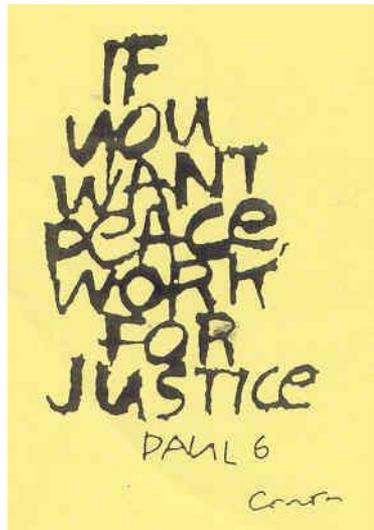
The roots of Parish Social Ministry are in Catholic social teaching. The Seven Themes provide the foundation for the Church's social doctrine. Before you get all project-driven, learn these. Reflect upon what you have learned. Like reading a map before you embark on a journey, this will guide future discussions about your mission statement and objectives. Many are not familiar with Catholic social teaching—it's called "The Best Kept Secret"; allowing time to learn about justice teaching and issues is a crucial part of the formation process.

Begin with the passions of the committee members.

Often parish social ministries sprout from the need to help others and, upon reflection of the causes of this need, blossom with the passion to change the laws and companies that created the need in the first place.

Combine social mission and respect life groups.

The first and fundamental principle of Catholic social teaching is "Life and the Dignity of the Human Person." Respect Life committees which embrace this principle have much in common with



“Peace and Justice” committees that also understand this theme. Social Mission groups such as St. Vincent DePaul, Habitat for Humanity, etc., provide the “works,” the charitable activities, which is one side of the coin and social justice is the other side; they are the same coin.

Annual Planning Session

—>**Create a mission statement** before the committee takes action—immediately or after learning about Catholic social teaching. A mission statement is your guide; it serves as your North Star; it reminds you of your purpose.

An effective mission statement is only one or two sentences. It explains what your group will do and how to accomplish it. A mission statement is a general statement and serves as an inspirational reminder of the committee’s purpose.

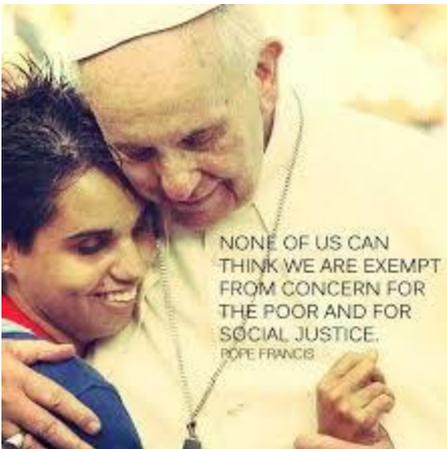
Example of a parish social justice ministry mission statement: In accordance with the teaching of Jesus, to act as both a catalyst and a participant, and to collaborate with both local and national communities, we will affect short-term and long-term solutions to build a just society that reflects the Kingdom of God.

—>Begin your planning session by **recapping the past year as precedence or guidance for the new year**. Congratulate yourselves on your accomplishments. After a vacation nothing stirs warm memories like looking at the photographs.

—>**Review your current focuses and agree upon new directions.** Ask yourselves if you still intend to support these activities. Brainstorm activities and agree on a direction(s) for the new year. Review these activities against your mission statement.

A parish social ministry will likely have different areas of interests, issues, and activities depending upon the passions of its members. For example, a committee might focus on hunger, migrant ministries, abortion, global warming/sustainability, voter registration. **Your focus depends upon the passions, the interests and the commitment (who will do the work?) of the committee and the parish.**

A wide variety of issues comprise Parish Social Ministry.



Just as we are each part of one Body, each issue is part of God's earthly kingdom of justice. No committee can equally address all issues so discern which ones you can address.

A parish social committee may find it useful to focus on the priority issues of the Office of Life, Justice and

Peace prioritizes: (2014-2015) Catholic Culture of Life, Care for God's Creation, Hunger, Immigrant Rights. And other focus issues: Economic Justice, Family, Mental Health and Human Trafficking.

—>**Distinguish between “social justice” and “charity” (“direct service”) but include both.** The Office of Life, Justice and Peace was created to focus on social justice issues but it also promotes acts of charity because:

-Involvement with charity often leads to justice work: you have witnessed the injustice and ask “why?”

-Charity work is personally satisfying -Charity work can involve the entire family, and begins the planting of the seeds of social justice in children

-Collaboration between the charitable and social justice ministries unites the parish

-Reflecting on a charitable volunteer experience helps us see the need for justice

-As James (James 2: 14-17) wrote:

WHAT GOOD IS IT, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, IF SOMEONE SAYS HE HAS FAITH BUT DOES NOT HAVE WORKS? CAN THAT FAITH SAVE HIM? IF A BROTHER OR SISTER HAS NOTHING TO WEAR AND HAS NO FOOD FOR THE DAY, AND ONE OF YOU SAYS TO THEM, “GO IN PEACE, KEEP WARM, AND EAT WELL,” BUT YOU DO NOT GIVE THEM THE NECESSITIES OF THE BODY, WHAT GOOD IS

IT? SO ALSO FAITH OF ITSELF, IF IT DOES NOT HAVE WORKS, IS DEAD.

—>New Ideas

Important! If there are new ideas, consider if any might fit into an existing activity or shared by another ministry. Don't spread yourselves too thin.

A new issue must have a leader, participation and perhaps a budget. Good ideas alone cannot be supported without the commitment of people to see them through.

—>**Break into small groups** based on interests, plan activities and budget (if appropriate) for the following year, come up with a suggestion on how to implement your social justice activity into your parish's faith formation programs. Plan activities by quarters (Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring).

—>**Regroup, recap and recalibrate** after you've completed your small group discussions.

Meetings

Meeting consistently promotes collaboration and a sense of shared mission. Meeting frequently tends to kill a lot of enthusiasm; too few meetings disrupts momentum and impede communication and collaboration.

Make meetings fun. Make them brief, substantive and enjoyable. Have snacks. Have an agenda. Include

prayer in your agenda. Get to know each other. Send information out early through e-mail to allow for more time for small-group breakouts at your meetings.

Sustaining your Parish Social Ministry

Recognize the difference between the Parish Social committee and the ministry. Just as the choir practices and leads the parish in song, parish social committees are the planners; ask and many parishioners will contribute their time, talent, or treasure especially when you offer specific opportunities, particularly with charitable work.

Important! Communicate the accomplishments of your committee. The parish can unite when it knows the successes and opportunities and focus issues of a ministry. Sharing your good works and opportunities encourages new participants, motivates current members, and creates a sense of accomplishment.

How to Communicate: Suggestions

*Weekly bulletin reflection, a principle of Catholic social teaching and announcements, within an allotted space:

Dignity of the Human Person: Peace: Respect for and development of human life requires peace... Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2304, 2306. "Let the brothers and sisters be gentle, peaceful and unassuming, mild and humble, speaking respectfully to all. . . And in greeting others, let them say, 'God give you peace'" - St. Francis of Assisi

Life and Dignity of the Human Person: "Human life is sacred and human dignity is the foundation of a moral vision for society." Since Roe v. Wade there have been 53 million abortions in the U.S. Pray for increased adoption support. Act by participating in 40 Days for Life.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable: "A basic moral test of any society is how our most vulnerable members are faring." Next Saturday and Sunday is the 2nd Sunday of the Month. Bring your food donations for the Offertory Collection

Solidarity: "We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences." Pray for refugees fleeing war and violence.

*Regular announcements at the end of mass or from the pulpit about opportunities

*Social Ministry webpage within the Parish website

*Parish Facebook Page

*Dedicated table and wall space for posters, education, information about opportunities, reflections

*Regular bulletin inserts, one for each focus issue

*Promote holiday giving opportunities, a time when generosity abounds

*Use the liturgical calendar and church events to promote your ministry: a crib during Respect Life Month; Voter Registration Drive before the primaries; give away reusable shopping bags on the Feast of St. Francis

*Yearly summary of your areas of focus, your members, and your accomplishments:

Major Areas of Focus

Migrant Ministry

Hunger

Sustainability / Global Warming

Respect Life

Your Social Justice Committee and Ministry

List your names. Don't be invisible!